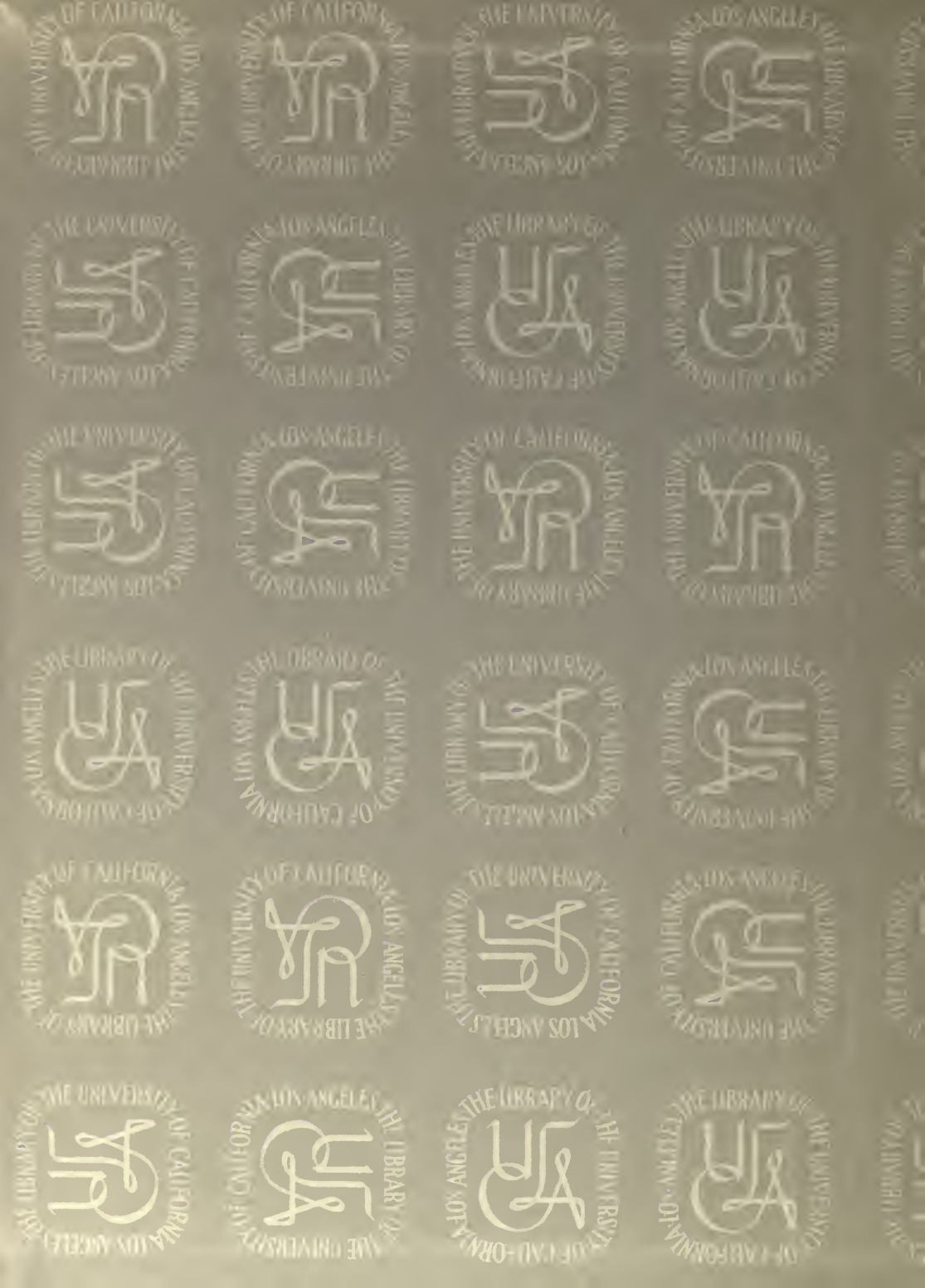


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Paris and Helen

by
W. J. Turner



London
Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd.

1921

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Paris and Helen

PART I

UPON Mount Ida in a dark-watered glen
Amid green forests far from living men
Paris was nurtured. Cold, pure water springs
Ripple in shadows and the ousel sings
A tune shade-ruffled with each wandering cloud
That fills the glade, wavering now low, now loud.
In mossy stillness glide the tranquil days
Whose light among the pebbles quietly plays
With no companion. Arachnè from the grass
Hangs on a silver thread o'er running glass
Where lies the image of the froned Fern—
Spirit of water, arisen in rocky urn,
A dripping shadow of the murmuring stream,
Moist skeleton hanging in day's golden beam.
All down the rocky gorge these frail forms lie
Curled sunbeams fallen through the branch-roofed sky
And turned to shadows or to shapes of mist
Secluded from all winds. And ever hissed
The scattered spray showering on leaf and stone

Where bird or bright-winged dragon-fly alone
Hovered and vanished with a noiseless light.
Here silence with the voice of water bright
Shone as there shines no Sun in all the world,
And gloom-bound rocks in soft dark damp enfurled
That silver sparkling stillness while the Moon
Uprose and waned, and a phantasmal noon
By bloom of orchis in the boughs was hung
Plucked by pale Oreads as they slipped among
The mossy trees. And in those silent woods
Fungus, a grey creeping shadow, broods.

The orioles' shadows flit from tree to tree,
The nightingale on the monotony
Of ever-falling water jet-like sings
Dropping in murmuring pools bright silver rings.
Or, far from water, dark-branched on a hill
Invisible, shall the pale evening fill
With stars' thin voices. Then the leopard goes—
A tiny shadow from the sparkling snows
Hung o'er his cave—creeping through floods of light
On the black rocks below the silver night.
Before the cold and pallid wave of Dawn
A low white mist rolls from the dappled fawn
Cropping the grass. The trees show one by one,
And when above the snowy peaks the Sun
Lifts his gold disc gold miniature ghosts arise
In the green woods, and stare with golden eyes,

Turning their rapt still faces slowly round
From East to West, following without a sound
That radiant dream drowned in green lakes of light
Sunken among the hills, whence in the night—
A pale, white-sheeted corpse—'twill reappear
Floating upon the sky, and cold and clear
The company of stars, slow following,
Harmoniously with crystal voices sing.

Deep in the shadows of a rocky glen
The boy was playing, pausing now and then
To hear a footfall in a neighbouring brake,
Or a slow-moving stag the foliage shake,
For hours he sat, or chased the butterflies,
Or stared in shallows where the minnow lies
Waving transparent fins against the stream.
The years slipped by, shadows that pass in dream,
Dappled with sunlight or in gleaming snow
Coldly apparelled. The bright gods come and go
On unknown errands bound among the trees.
Often a Naiad's bright blown hair he sees
Deep in the dark rock of a waterfall,
And hears sad Echo from a far hill call
Narcissus, pale stretched on a fountain's brim.
Hidden in leaves Paris had gazed at him
Till, frightened, on tip-toe he'd crept away,
And wandered through the forest sunken all day

In dreamy meditation. Later at eve,
When the great trees in close communion weave
Mysterious dimness, with a beating heart
He would steal forth, and glimpse Orion start
Up from his couch of violets faintly blue,
And rooted in the dark lose his bright hue
Fading, struck pale, with backward-gazing head
Where the Moon rose : and all the forest lay dead
Like cold plucked flowers upon a mortal's eyes
Whose bier by mourning stars surrounded lies.
Then by the river Paris made a reed
And blew from it faint songs in sudden need
Of a voice behind the loveliness that flew
Before his eyes ; and year by year he grew
Ever more skilful, till the shepherds came
By night to sit around him in the flame
Of many stars, clouded about by trees.
And as he sang, swaying, a charmèd breeze
Rocked in the tree-tops and the lonely pines
On mountain tops where the carved moon reclines
Stirred with the voice of melancholy seas
Buried in moonlight. There the Nereides
Seated on rocks into the night complain
Of their virginity, their shadows stain
The silver ocean. Against the starry sky
They lift dark arms in the bright melancholy
Silence of moonlight. Silent in a ring
The shepherds dream, to their dark faces bring

Pale winds of earth forgetfulness. They drink
The silver music and their bodies sink
Into the trees. And in the silent night,
Above the branches burns the moon's soft light.

When the snows tumbling in their glimmering floods
With cold bright Spring light filled the leafy woods,
Paris met Cœnone. She bore a spray
Of pure white lilies plucked at break of day
In a far glade where milk of Juno fell.
Bare-armed she met him in a shady dell,
Those snowy fountains branching from her hand,
And on the green trees' verge he thought to stand
For ever, fearing lest he might awake,
And that snow-glimmer in the dark air break
As breaks the foam dying upon the wave.
But Juno to her maiden votary gave
Speech, and her voice trembling among the leaves
Melodious waters for his parched soul weaves
As weaves the soft voice of a waterfall
In the day's heat, the star-wreathed dewy pall
Of Evening, the clear pool, the crystal drink
In calm repose upon the water's brink.
And his lips framing : O never, never move,
And I'll stay here, and I shall always love.
He took her like a snow-pale cherry bough
Plucked from the wood. Her white hand on his brow

Banished love's fever, and her empty dress
Fluttered its white folds in the green wilderness.

Gaily together at each dawn they go
To that quiet glade where Juno's lilies grow
And pluck them for her altar in a grove
Deep in a mountain valley. Their calm love
Filled with a quiet worship her dark shrine.
Tranquil they pour libations of red wine
And lay the lilies on the dewy stone.
Their marble limbs at last to stillness grown
With linkèd hands mid the green trees adore—
Like two pale Winds snow-carved, the dark air's core.
The white-armed goddess, healer of love's distress,
Wreathed all their days in mellow happiness,
And where by fountain or by rock they stood
There fell a shaft of gold light in the wood.
With married hands adream in tranquil bliss
They stand in gorges where green waters hiss
Through trembling shadows of dark maiden-hair,
As though in Pluto's gloomy realm a pair
Of white doves hovered. Under the clear sky
Of evening's stars across the grass they fly,
A shadow on the dim air chasing light
Together sinking in the arms of night.

There is a glen that none but Paris knows
When in hushed air a bow of water blows
And all the trees around in deep calm seem
Profoundly still as in a timeless dream.
To that still place, forgetful of his bride
Bright as a Moon-dropped arrow by his side,
Oft he would travel in the hush of night
To gaze on that dark-hung, cascading light.
It was as though to dead mid dead the roar
Of life came tumbling down, the foaming core
Of living matter smashing in earth's void room
Filled with dead relics like a lover's tomb.
He felt as though he stood watching the spawn
Of some new world, thus had he watched at dawn
The sun's expanding gold flow on the hills,
And that same tense and brooding silence fills
The air in autumn, when in one night lie
The earth's dark peaks snow-white below the sky.
Thus is the silence in a sun-filled glade
When steps a fawn out of the forest shade
And soundless as an errant sunbeam dies
Among the tree-trunks where the sun's mottled eyes
Noiselessly flicker. Upon the watching gloom
Thus grows the storm-cloud's thunder-spotted bloom—
The stillness of the world its slender stem,
Pricked by far lightning on the earth's green hem.
His heart quick-beating Paris steals away,
And through the forest wanders alone all day,

And when night comes, sitting upon a stone
Sings in the solitude of moonlight thrown
Like a pure veil of water on the trees
That wave—the shadows of his melodies.
He sees his happiness before him fade
Like a bright bubble blown from a cascade
Among the trees, shining it slowly falls,
A phantom brightness no stretched hand recalls.
And to the solitary Moon he sings :

On his brow fall shadows from passing wings . . .
The Moon is sinking to a distant hill ;
In the moist air thousands of leaves sleep still ;
The Eastern stars will soon pale in the skies,
Their brothers watching them with silver eyes
Drown one by one. A solitary pine
Shows on an eastern ridge, whose purple line
Borders a sky of palest, jade-like green.
The last star twinkles and is no more seen.

Through dewy grasses Paris homeward goes.
No roving wind the topmost foliage blows,
Bird, branch and leaf are an intense delight
In the pure snow-peak-shadowed, cloud-washed light.
Out of a shady tree a peacock flies
An undulating blaze of golden eyes,
Awaking in the heart of joy an ache

All present captive loveliness to forsake
For some remoter beauty. Paris walks on.
Now from the air the touch of snow is gone,
And a gold shadow fills the denser shade.
He pauses on the border of a bright glade
Filled with a soft, serene, unearthly light.
There, walking on the grass, plain to his sight
Appeared the golden Venus, like a bloom
Darkening the sunlight as a Moon in gloom
Of midnight shining. Honey of golden bees
Glimmered her hair among the sunny trees,
And a pale froth of flame about her feet
Foamed on the grass. A smile so languid sweet
Lay like a full-blown rose upon her lips
That in its faint light all the forest slips
Into a placid dream. Its leafy boughs
In yellow gold more pale than sunshine drowse,
And Paris hears a voice that softlier calls
His name than in the heat of cities falls
Water among remembered mountains. Still
As a basin which those waters fill
Amid the ruins of an emptied town
Stood Paris, his life to cold, dead fragments blown.
Breathing no longer under mortal skies
But, out of time, gazing with glassy eyes
He sees pale Juno's lily deathly white
Lying abandoned in the dew-cold light,
Blue-eyed Athena's ægis faintlier hued

From him forever fading unpursued.
Frozen in wild and frantic grief he stood
His joys like withered flowers dropped in a wood.
That clear voice ceased, bathed in a golden calm
She half-upraised her dim-white ivory palm
Shedding a creamy shadow on the groves
Of violets where rose her fluttering doves.
Then in soft clouds of light melting away
She left the glade bright with transparent day.

In the late sultry afternoon he came
Upon two strangers, calling him by name
They stopped him. All around the thunder rolled
In distant rumbling as their tale they told,
A tale of Ilion and her white-haired King.
From hanging clouds faintly illumining
Their faces zagged the lightning palely bright,
While their dark cloaks flapped in dim yellow light.
They were two messengers sent up from Troy
To search the mountains for that shepherd boy
Who was King Priam's son. The lightning blazed
On their white shining eyes as Paris gazed
Into their faces. Down in the valley stood
Stiff in the murky glare a still-leafed wood.
Ever more dim flapped the last rags of day
While Paris led them down the forest way
Into a sheltering cave. Then like a pall

Upon the trees dropped stillness, as a fall
Of snow drops softly from a shadowed sky.
Through the dim trunks silent they hurried by,
A few big drops of rain splashing their hands,
Until with his companions Paris stands
Within the cave. In crashing glimmering rain
The silence burst, they tell their tale again.
Their words were little sounds that fell like leaves
When rocks are falling and the lightning cleaves
The purple sky, yet in their whispering noise
The people flocked into the streets of Troy's
Sun-towering city, and their faces grew
Vivid to Paris gazing. Then the wind blew
Into the cave blotting against the walls
Their dark loose capes. Once more silence falls.
Some breathing soul in face and rock to find
Vainly essays his restless, wandering mind,
He could say nothing they would understand :
They had such empty eyes ; and what they planned
He heeded not, for a great weariness
Weighed on his spirit, and his loneliness
Stood up within the cave and gazed at him
And he at it until his sight grew dim
And all his passion slowly ebbed away,
Leaving his body clay outstretched on clay.

On the cave's floor asleep three figures lie.
Above the roof, in the night's dark clear sky

Hang in unfathomable gulfs the stars, ablaze
With revolution. Down their secret ways
Spinning in icy solitudes they go
Where no loud winds through the deep silence blow ;
And there no spirits adrift on silver wings
With ardent faces touch Aeolian strings ;
There are no gathered votaries rapt and pale,
No wild-eyed congregations to cry " hail ! "
To Gods of stream or forest, moon or sun—
Gods in that everlasting cold are none :
Nor men, nor beasts, nor streams, nor trees, nor flowers,
No dawn nor evening, winter or summer hours,
No young Nymphs raising warm white arms of love
Among dark myrtles in the Cyprian's grove,
But myriad constellations in a vice
Of frozen speed through dark transparent ice
Within a million forest rain-drops gleam
Glittering above three figures stretched in dream.

Paris awoke as the faint orange green
Of morning washed the east. In its serene
And paling azimuth the last stars sank,
And avidly the hills and tall trees drank
Calm floods of light, and lay like liquid gems
Bedded in reefs of darkness. Shadowy stems
Emerged from cloudy forests ; dim and white
Buried cascades glimmered in bands of light
Along the valleys. Through high sunlit shades

The twittering birds flew into deeper glades,
Their songs lost in moist darkness, and the ridge
Of Ida lay a snowy glittering bridge
Across the sky climbed by an orb of gold.
Into a world immensely still and old
Three figures came, descending silently
To Iliion's towers beside the glimmering sea.

PART II

The helmsman dozed, the ship ran lightly on
To Western hills where the Sun, quarrying, shone,
And at the prow in tranquil poise, alone,
The love-child gazed on floors of bright green stone,
Its face reflected in the polished pools
Of its warm image, which no salt spray cools.
But sunk from peaks cold in the spring-time sky
Sea-wandering airs touched vainly with a sigh
That painted Amor carved upon the prow,
To whose fixed smile the Dolphins under the bow
Turn their eyes upwards in the glassy weather.
A brightness palpable as a snowy feather
Lay on the gulf. All day they had been drawn
Through strange smooth water of a haze-still dawn,
Like men who waking wake into a dream
Wherein they move, and all their movements seem
Oddly familiar, yet uncomprehended
With gestures half begun fading unended.
A spirit drew them through resistless water
Zoned with deep calm. Nereus' fairest daughter
Sailing her shell on the horizon saw
Those Trojans voyaging to fulfil the law

That led them from the dark, unknowing East
To a most subtle splendour in the West.
Deep violet Mountains cut in the hyaline
Of the green sky in agate stillness shine
As though the Winds like fallen Titans lay
Huge emerald rocks piled up by tranquil day.
Thin puffs of smoke upon each terraced hill
Thousands of olives with grey softness fill
The wild hard brightness of the glittering sea ;
And the carved, lovely, strange anemone
Whose hair is like a cold jewel cut by water
Stands on the cliff where the tired Zephyr brought her,
Awaiting in a stiff and dream-like trance
Till at her feet the wavelets sparkling dance.

'Twas such a day that Aphrodite came
Into the world. Pale as a torch's flame
In still bright sunlight foamed the crystal wave ;
So white she was, the sea as in a cave
Darkened, and in the brightness of her gaze
Olympus' snow seemed an obsidian glaze.

Silent the mariners gazed upon the coast
To which they moved, and each man at his post
Marvelled. A spirit ever unsatisfied
Had driven them on when many a man had died
With eyes fixed on the horizon where Troy faded,
His heart with bitter homesickness invaded.

All felt the spell, but he beside the mast
Moved not, wondering if he had sailed at last
Into the Gods' calm, secret dwelling-place.
But from the hills She looked with tranquil face
Whose loveliness had cast on earth and sea
The strange cold brightness of the trumpet lily,
Lonelily dwelling in a dark orange garden.
As soft winds mountain contours slowly harden
And on the bright sky carve in delicate line
Titanic sculpture, thousands of lovers refine
The human body ; and whence that wonder came
The songs of Kings and Shepherds, could they name
That which on earth they vainly sought, had told
Of Helen's beauty—that profile pure and cold
Faintlier drawn than shells graved by the sea—
And how like clouds moored in wild harmony
Upon the unruffled azure of the sky
Passion sleeps in her lovely, tranquil eye.
She sat, and all the birds of earth were still
In her noonday, the shadow of her hill
Fell like a Dream upon the narrow bay
In which that ship dawned, errandless as the day.
Swift the sails sank, plunging the anchor fell,
Sound ebbled and left the ship, as though a spell
Had breathed that word and printed it on those seas
Serifed with hanging rocks and thin calm trees.
The sailors made fast to the little quay,
Then sank upon the smooth deck sleepily ;

Strange in Greek waters, furred, blunt-nosed and dark,
Her masts just stirring, rode the Trojan bark.

Paris, a guest in Menelaus' hall
That night, amazed, sat marvelling at all
The cold, strange beauty of the foreign race.
A virginal, fresh, unambiguous grace
Lived in each amphora, each painted dish.
On one he saw, riding a curious fish,
A maiden with carved, wind-blown, streaming hair,
Whose small and delicate profile left the air
Filled with wild calm, as a bright tropic bloom
A mirage heat casts in a northern room.
The metal goblet whence he drank his wine
Was chased with figures ; under a twisting vine
Sat an old King, to him a lovely Youth
Offered a cup. 'Twas all, and yet in truth
Such tranquil loveliness was in their shapes
Paris with hot hands gripped the clustered grapes,
And madly gazed at the boy's faint sweet smile
For ever fixed. He drank. Softly meanwhile
Two flutes on Time shadows of music made
As upon light life casts a trembling shade—
Earth's mountains in the tranquil wave of Day
As wings reflected in a small bright bay
From a migrating bird. He gazed around
And on still faces sculptured he saw sound

As one might see, dream-faced, a bright, gold Hour
With lidded eyes float on a sun-lit flower.

As shines the oleander in the gloom
Of waters which the pale evening stars illumine,
So in that music Helen's beauty pale.
On a dark rock he sat, a fading sail
Glimmered above the music's falling wave.
He looked into her eyes. Dark yawned Troy's grave.
The flutes died down. A youth lovely as He
Who stood immortal under the vineyard tree
Arose with harp, his hand upon the strings
Carved a deep stillness. Softly, far-off, he sings :

*Now let Love come,
And bring his lute and touch a simple strain,
A song to charm a Thracian village maid,
Some smooth-worn antique story,
Fit to express true lovers' sweet and pain,
Bewitching Pan within his sylvan glade,
Or Siren on her rocky promontory !*

*Long, long ago,
In Heaven's unsullied calm and silence deep,
When Beauty unadmired sat with bright wing
In languor golden,*

*The young Love came, sliding in Jove's clear sleep ;
By him the joyfullest and the fairest thing
In dream beholden.*

*There fell a light
Upon the gold tranquillity of Time,
And on the marble Silence music fell
Like sparkling water,
Its brightness playing in the shades sublime
Of the old Gods that in Olympus dwell
As an old man's daughter*

*Plays at life's eve.
There was no memory of joy in heaven,
There was no shadow in the ambrosial air
Of earthly sorrow,
No beauty of the Morn and of the Even,
No sigh of mortal maid combing her hair
For song to borrow.*

*Perplexed Love stood,
Then turned and wooed the lonely ear of Death,
In soft tones such as Life had never heard
Calling him brother.
Nor did Death frost him with his icy breath,
But, glittering, in dark Loveliness interred
Embraced the other.*

*With clasped hands
In calm, more beautiful than Night and Day,
From the immortal brightness of the Gods
They flew together.
A shepherd saw them when the dawn was grey
Float o'er the hills to which, dream-eyed, he plods,
A white, and ebon feather.*

*The marble Gods
Into eternal quietness return,
Hearing no more Love's music gently rain ;
And they will never—
Recumbent in their golden slumber—learn
How Death pledged Love, his brother, to remain
On earth for ever.*

The singer raised a goblet to his mouth ;
On all the faces round he saw a drouth
Like to his own ; such, on a summer day,
Steals upon children wearying of play,
And makes the fountain sunk in earth's monotone
Suddenly high and bright speak out alone.
And all the company to Helen turned
Who, like the Moon in earth's dark water, burned
Lovely and pure, shedding immortal light
Into that hall oblonged from ebon night.
Paris in grief drank on ; he would drink in
His cup the dazzling fairness of her skin.

But She, remote, sat in his fevered eye
As the Moon sits in the illumined sky
Frantic with that strange beauty, so wild and calm,
So unattainable. Her lovely arm
Glinting like marble moonlight in the brain,
Unseizable as the cold silver stain
That lies upon night's mountains ! What was she
But moonlight sparkling on the blood's dark sea ?

'Twas evening. The Trojan ship still lay
Quiet as a rock fallen into the bay.
Spring from the dark hills long ago had fled,
And summer in thick-leafed vines made her dry bed
Among the stones brought by a torrent's fall.
In the dim moonless sky the stars were small,
And on the darkling sea Sirius cast
The faint light of a thousand ages past.
Upon the promontory's pine-clad side
Flowering against the rocks that amianth tide
Tossed the white petals of its dying bloom
Where Helen sat. The water's wasting gloom
In the clear night shadowed her lovely brow
That charmed a sea-air-cradled cherry-bough
Above her head into a crystal calm.
The shores around diffused a broken balm
Of ambergris from the soft coralline foam
That glitters, encrusting many a Nereid's home
In sparkling grotts among far-famed isles

Whose witchery the mirroring sea beguiles.
What thoughts were in her heart as with bright gaze
Inscrutable she watched the faint thin rays
Shower from the stars ?

Love leans across the night,
A starry Bough in Ethiop's deserts bright
Whereto dark Kings and multitudes in dream
Do travel slowly. A constellation's gleam
Lighting its flames within the hearts of men
To build up civilizations, and unpen
Old savage hordes to cease their banqueting,
Pull up their tent pegs, murder every weakling
And leave the plains their generation knew
To march into dim lands whence Rumour blew
Stories of temples built into the stars,
And Gods more strange and beautiful than Mars.
Where lie their bones ? In valleys where the grass
Pastures the sheep. On lonely hills where pass
None but the stars. And where lost treasures gleam
On the sea's bottom. Does She know the theme
Of all the voyages and songs of men ?
Whisper to her what shall befall them when
The loveliness they seek lies in their hands
And, looked at nearly, vanishes in the sands
Of disillusioning Time : O tell her this,
Sea-wandering breeze, ere Paris with a kiss
Stand at her side, and taking her white hand
Lead her this night to grieve in a far land !

Up from the little bay now Paris leaps
And climbs the hillside, brushing beside the heaps
Of dry sticks in the vineyards. Overhead
The faint stars crusted in their azure bed
Mark the pale milk-dim Way. Great cherry boughs
Close to his arm within the darkness drowse,
And cypresses that all the day-time stand
In soft, green grass rock-like upon the land
Now sleep like angels from a darker world
With wings to tall thin bodies closely furled.
On the warm, moonless air the orange glows
A dull ghost orb, and from its still leaf throws
A spectral sunshine on the smooth dark stem
Of its own branches—Strangest of trees that hem
The dark green borderland of conscious life
Where Plant with Plant maintains an eyeless strife,
Casting wild arms into the azure deep
Of space, and struggling to throw off the sleep
That chains it down to valley and to hill
O'er which man seems to wander at his will !
But what strange power thrusting pale Paris up
Clomb on the hill ? Toward that precious cup
Of Greek-won loveliness, with burning eye
Among the sprawling serpent-figs that lie
Pinned to the ground eating their great wide leaves,
Paris pressed on. The branching olive weaves
An airy veil of shadow overhead
And a moist Shadow sleeps in the stream's dry bed.

Her lover led her down the steep hill-side.
In the dark ship he hid his lovely bride :
Darker the hills and the sea's surface grew,
And on the stars a sudden darkness blew.
A boy awaking in the hot summer night
Sole in the palace saw the Trojan's flight,
Hearing the clanking of the anchor chain
Upon the deck. He watched, as the stars wane,
The ropes cast off, the sailors in a boat
Row the ship out ; he saw her gently float
Toward the headland, saw her great, moth-like wings
Dim in the dark. Dreaming of journeyings
That he would take when he was grown a man
He stayed there, motionless, until a span
Of Eastern cloud grew purple on the bright
Wave of the dawn that drowned the stars' faint light ;
Then shivering sought his bed. The empty bay
Filled slowly with the glittering flood of day.

PART III

Hoary with winds and with uncounted time,
The walls of Troy stood in that summer clime
By Tenedos, like some sublime sea-wrack
Lifted from ocean's floor. Fissure and crack
Witnessed eternity's slow-ebbing wave
Of sun and moonlight, whose strong waters lave
From King to King those buttresses and towers
Winter to winter glazed with dull sea-flowers,
And coated over with encrusted foam
From the salt waves ; lichen on roof and dome
Throwing no sparkle in the burning light
Of Asian deserts nor in the greyness bright
Of the pale silver sand below the Moon
Whose ripples like the ribs of dead winds strewn
Summon the glimmer of a pebbled noise
Out of the cavernous past, whence rose up Troy's
Foundations to the touch of trembling tone,
And hands invisible placed stone on stone.
Enormous age has smoothed her stones away
And the soft giant hands of Night and Day
Have crumbled mountain dust upon her walls,
And her dust on the mountains. Slowly falls
The new bright glory of that citadel

Into the dull, dim sand ; and they that dwell
In kingdoms far, travelling across the plain
As used their sires, lift up their gaze and strain
Amazèd eyes at that dim hoary ghost
Whose huge mossed walls jut like a foam-veiled coast
Into the blazing sun. Those agèd crags
Time-bleached, and bare of young war's coloured flags,
Not one gay pennant fluttering to the sky,
No scarf or bond of love to catch the eye
Waved secretly from window or from roof,
But as a grave of gods, sublime, aloof.
Thus Iliion stood, from unknown quarries sprung
And shining on her towers the stars looked young.

Down from the mountains like a gleaming wind
Blowing pale tracks on olive foliage thinned,
Her streaming hair a bright pursuing flame,
Into the Phrygian town Cassandra came.
Mounting a wall she seaward gazing stood,
Her garments fluttering, restless as her mood.
It was late afternoon. The blood of day
From the sky's silver pool dwindling away
Suddenly glimmered in a low, red sail
Upon the horizon. Then came a far, faint hail
From Paris' sailors at the sight of Troy,
And from blind walls floated faint shouts of joy.
Cassandra heard that long expected call
Of doom foretold, and rushed into the hall

Of Priam throned in council. All around
Sat the great lords in stillness. Not a sound
Disturbed the solemn, century-laden air.
Deep in the chamber shone the snowy hair
Of Priam, the pale ghost of many kings
Whose buried eyes looked out from scattered things—
The spoils of ancient wars—with a still gaze,
The very heat and dust of those dead days
Engrimed upon the squat, wide-staring heads
Of conquered gods in whose glazed eyes Fear treads
With soft tramp muffled from all living ears.
Huge painted masks and great barbaric spears
Were hung around ; the peacocks' hundred eyes
In beaten gold enamelled. Purple skies
Ablaze with stars arched o'er those Trojan lords
Who sat bejewelled grasping their jewelled swords,
Their faces like old rocks pitted and hewn
And with the growth of time hap-hazard strewn
About the sockets where their bright eyes lay
Like age-dimmed rubies bedded deep in clay.
What wind could move them from their seats of gold ?
For time had sunk from them, life's tide had rolled
Out of their hearts and left them and their griefs
Desolate and bare, like sea-deserted reefs
Glinting at times with light, a memory
Beneath those stars of the wide-glimmering sea
From whose deep murmuring life at last emerged
They faintly ring, and with their feet submerged

In ebbing time incline their souls to hear
Life's music faint receding in their ear.

The pillars of that hall were purple stone,
The capitals a cup-flower now unknown
Painted bright gold. Of lapis-lazuli
With shimmering wings a glittering dragon-fly
Crawled upon every flower. With wearied gaze
Amid magnificence Hector's glance strays
To one small panel by an unknown hand
Showing that Prince to whom from the far land
Of Persia travellers brought a pale grey rose ;
Holding it in his hand he dreaming goes
For ever with slow steps and pale face bent
Over the lovely bloom. Astonishment
At their young Prince's passion for a flower
Dim as the dawn, whose dew-clad, silver hour
Blooms on dark hills and dies in the gold Sun,
Fell on the court. In all the land was none
Who, watching, understood why the warm blush
Of life died in his cheek. That wondering hush,
So long ago begun, to Hector seemed
Present and deepening, raising his eyes he dreamed
The portals of the hall were opening wide,
There stood Prince Paris with his heavenly bride.
Upon King Priam and those silent lords
Then fell the glance that drew ten thousand swords
To flash on Ilium. Slowly in that blaze

The Phrygian Princes rose. The darkening day's
Pale beams flickered bright arms and left the room ;
Cassandra shrieked, and fled across the gloom.

'Twas summer, and such brightness filled the land
That, working in the vineyards, men would stand
And gaze at one another as in dream,
Their faces bright as gods'. The tranquil gleam
Day after shining day of some still light
Within the sunshine shadowed upon their sight
The brilliancy of tree, rock, flower and stone.
Such beauty on the earth had not been known
As in those days. The bloom upon the grape
Was purple as the night when from a cape
Fire-cragged in heaven the lightning leaves its cloud,
And, black upon purple, trees together crowd
Distinct upon earth's shoulder. On the hills
Puffed from the burning ground a thousand rills
Of pale smoke-spirals, the bright olive-trees
Hung motionless. A glaze upon the sea's
Calm azure stone made the coast mountains seem
Slumber-pale jade, smoke of an orient dream.
Wild fragile flowers, bright-coloured crowds at noon
And dying heaps of shadows under the moon,
Thin painted flames burning on earth inch-high
Still as the gold orb motionless in the sky
Wreathed on the air a soft mysterious light.

In shining silence birds took curving flight
From tower to tower. The solitary palm
Dropped slowly its ripe fruit into the calm.
On the still sunlight the huge cactus sprawls
Its monstrous brood, as though from Ilion's walls
The dark miasma of a nightmare dream
Crept forth by day to gaze into the stream
That slowly wandered, crazed with secret light
Mirrored from Trojan turrets, when by night
A shutter opens, and the silver hand
Of Helen gleams across the shadowed land.

Down by the sea, among the wave-worn crags
Gathering up fuel, an ancient Woman drags
Her weary feet. She does not raise her eyes
Across the sea, or to the milky skies ;
Bent almost double she goes up and down
Putting dry weeds into her tattered gown.
Often she pauses by strange lovely shells,
She sees them not, nor thinks to hear what dwells
Within their coils, a music soft and wild
Which oft had made her heart beat when a child
She picked them up ; but this she has forgot,
Her awe, her joy, her life she has forgot.
Only the fire upon her hearth remains
And for its feeble heat are all her pains.
Therefore the Grecian fleet she did not see

When round the headland it came silently.
It was a hazy, dream-like afternoon ;
In the pale milky sky a paler Moon
Shone wanly as each ghostly dromond came,
Its sail a slanting lemon-coloured flame
On the pale sea against the hills of jade.
Cleaving the calm their prows no white foam made
But onward to that sleeping coastline drew ;
And on each deck in shining brass the crew
Stood and gazed speechless at the silent coast,
As if to hills of dream sailed a dream host.

They landed, and they seized that ancient crone.
Her lifeless body into the sea was thrown
At evening, as the stars began to shine
Upon the water ; past the low dark line
Of ships she floated, drifting out to sea,
Turning and spinning, slowly, silently,
On the cold twilight brightness of the waves,
Far travelling from the low ancestral graves
Clustered under the hill—Death's little town,
Silvered with stars under its cypress crown
In whose dark rock-repose she thought to lie.
Her head, deep-drowned, hung downward from the sky,
And in the waves her feet with soles upturned
The stars' pale glimmer to the stars returned.
Soon the deep sea grew dark, and, like a shroud,
Wrapping the graves of stars, low-ridged in cloud

The silence of the heavens deeper grew ;
A wandering bird darker than darkness flew
As the Moon rose on the sky's furrowed snow
Glinting the pale tents of the Greeks below.
There Agamemnon and Ulysses stand,
Their shadows on the beach, gazing inland
On the dim hills that ring their glimmering camp
Up-tossed like foam to shine in Heaven's lamp
For ten long years, and then to fade away
As hoar-frost fades in the warm breath of day.
All through the night the sentries paced the shore,
A faint light sparkling on the arms they bore
From the sky's arch of snow down-fallen. Soon
In Ilion Helen's shutter closed. The Moon
Shone in a shell of silence.

Meander and Scamander bright with blood
Through Springs and Winters roll into the flood
Of Ocean. Many a green wave laid on shore
A sudden foam-wreath sanguined with the gore
Of heroes whose rags flutter in the wind
Under a whitening rib or hip-bone pinned
On which by Moon or Sun the shadow falls
Of the white Neophron that haunts the walls
Of cataracts, gloom-bound, in Idalian glen,
Its beating wings drawn with bright eyes of men
To Troy's towers, vanning out of each dark ravine

White as a Moon by sunlight faintly seen
In dying Greek or Trojan's glazing eye—
A floating doom down-dropping from the sky.
Great names are fading into little pools
Of humble blood the dew of evening cools,
And pale torn bodies that no longer tent
The tortured spirit, in grief and passion bent
To suffering angles lie upon the plain.
Bleeding the wounded warrior rises again
And on dim enemies redouble blows
From dawn till eve. And there is no man knows
In all the warring hosts of Greece and Troy
Why they stay there fighting with bitter joy
Among the summer flowers and the bright rains
Of winter. Simoïseus' brains
Stain the white sand. Iphidamus a boy
Who left his marriage feast to fight at Troy
With Coön his brother lies. They had not seen
Helen, but dreaming in dark tents had been
Drawn into battle for a shining name.
And many an obscure Greek unknown to fame
Stayed fighting on that shore to which he'd steered
Long years ago, when in day-dream appeared
Glad, bright-eyed visions even from sleep now flown.
Dreamless each stands there and each fights alone.
Even the bright gods no man ever saw
Flash through the azure air, but some grim law
Keeps him dull-eyed still fixed in that hard place

Where in his youth he came. The lovely face
Sung by the messenger among the isles
Of Greece, years gone, no more his heart beguiles ;
But still the sun goes down day after day,
And faces of friends in battle fade away,
And from the dust and wind and clashing swords,
Flies the sweet dream he had when on the boards
Of his first ship he lay, watching the stars,
The prey of beauty and heroic wars.

In Iliion's citadel in deepest gloom
The sons of Priam walk as in a tomb,
The walls are hung with darkness, and black clouds
Rest upon all its streets. The stars in shrouds
Of sombre winds shudder and flash through veils
Of gusty moonbeams in whose radiance pales
Cassandra's torch, as she comes from the hall
Where Hector's body lay, wrapped in its pall.
And as she passes, noiseless, on the stone
The shadow of her fluttering robe is blown
Below that chamber in the moonlit tower
Where Helen sits, remembering the sad hour
When after years of battle the Greeks sent
A herald to bewail the brave blood spent
So fruitlessly, and swearing they would burn
Their tents and go—would the King but return
To Menelaus his abducted Queen !

And mid the Trojan lords Paris had been
Silent, but Hector, looking on the man,
Wearily smiled ; and she'd no need to scan
Those faces further, for she straightway knew
Hector was Hector, and to Hector true.
He had not seen that perfect loveliness
Which ached in Paris, knew not his weariness,
Nor could he guess the meaning of their eyes ;
For Paris looked on Helen as on skies
Of charted stars astronomers have gazed
Lost in their little knowledge. No more blazed
Torrents of magic lightning in the air,
But on his eyeballs she lay coldly fair.
And he forgot her as he turned away
And left the council. Staring upon the day,
As he had stared upon that cave's dumb walls
In Ida's forest where the water falls
In the still golden Sun making a cry
Of lonely misery, he wondered why
In love's bright bubble of the Moon men crept
To sleep and die. Helen softly wept.

Hector was dead, and yet the bright stars shone,
And wandering in the night, her gaze fell on
The flood of Xanthus silver in the moon
Noiselessly bubbling through night's sombre noon,
Carrying a pale light from the tops of hills
Like a swift thief who in the dark mine fills

His hands with jewels, and, running, drips with light
Yet is as poor as Paris in his flight
Among the nations with the jewel of maids.
And utter weariness her soul invades,
As if the moon were weary of its light
And its idolaters, who with their bright
Uplifted hands in woods and gardens sing
Hymns to a nothing that can only bring
Empty illumination to a world
Of shadows. Slowly her soul unfurled
Its sable wings and backward flew through time
And forward through the future with sublime
Pang of imagination for the dust
That drifts upon all living things. So must
The stars themselves upon the mind grow dim
And lovers lose their idols, foiled like him
Of some diviner essence, growing cold
To all the beauty that their bride's eyes hold
And wandering through earth with a madman's eye
Fixed on a light behind all lights that lie
In stars or pools, or falling from Moon or Sun
Shine on bright bodies from dark chaos won.
High in her lonely tower she leans all night
On gloom and darkness a pale cloud of light.

Troy's fallen, and her name become a tale.
Now one by one the Grecian ships set sail,
Softly they steal all the long afternoon

Out of the bay. Once more a ghostly moon
Hangs in the sky, once more their bronze prows made
No white foam on the pale sea where the jade
Calm mountains lie, smoke of an orient dream.
Dromond on dromond, trireme on trireme,
They stole away, disturbing on his wing
No bee among the flowers. Far off, the ring
Of cataracts falling in Idalian gloom
Faint shook the air, filling it with the bloom
Of myriad flowers. In silence hung the grape
Its purple thunder, and the soaring shape
Of Neophron, dark-shadowed in the flood
Of bright Scamander, from dried fields of blood
Fades silently away to where cold spills
That silver source in the rock-chasmed hills.

When evening came half of the fleet was gone ;
All through the night they vanished one by one,
Until King Menelaus' ship, the last,
Awoke at dawn. Against the thin black mast
The Wind hung dead ; a little Moon gold-bowed
Warmed in the Southern sky. The sailors rowed
On the calm water towards dawn's sheet of green
With small quick motions making earth more serene
Around that small dark ship where Helen lay . . .
The Sun's bright gold danced in the empty bay.

The Moon, grown cold, hung o'er the rocky coast
To which the sea foamed like another ghost.

Deep in the mountains sang a shepherd boy
An ancient song, older than Greece or Troy :

*Across the day from hill to hill
My flock and I are wandering,
And we like you are never still
Until from cold
We creep to fold.
Where is your house, O Sun?
Where do you go
When the stars creep like flocks of sheep
Across the pastures of the sky?
Where do you lie?
Where do you lie?
Tra-la-la, Tra-la-la,
Where do you lie?
Tra-la-la-la la-la-la-la, Tra-la-la-la la-la la-la.*



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